

Lyons Farms' Stone School House, now in garden of Newark Museum, was moved in 1938 from Elizabeth and Chancellor avenues where it was erected in 1784.
Photo Courtesy Newark Museum.

WHEN NEWARK WAS YOUNGER:

Readin', Writin' . . .

City Has Provided for Education of Children Since 17th Century; Some Early Schools Still Stand

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AS every pupil in the city knows, the oldest school building in Newark is the Stone School House now standing in the garden of the Newark Museum. There are those who claim that this is not Newark's oldest school house, since the Lyons Farms section where the school originally stood was not a part of Newark until about 1902.

From 1835 until that year, Lyons Farms was a part of Clinton Township, set off from Newark just before we received our city charter. The corner occupied by the school, at Pot Pie Lane, now Chancellor avenue, on the upper road to Elizabeth, was originally in Elizabethtown. It was not a part of the Newark school system, for the township and the city were entirely separate.

To Dr. William R. Ward, we are indebted for much of our knowledge of the Old Stone School House. A former resident of Lyons Farms, now part of the Weequahic section, he entered school there 70 years ago last month. The school was a typical one-room district school, and the year Dr. Ward entered, there were 40 pupils, all taught by one teacher, Miss Ida McLeod, who came there at the age of 18 and taught for three years. A high school graduate, and an exceptionally fine woman, Miss McLeod taught for a salary not exceeding $600 a year and boarded with neighbors.

A locally elected board of trustees managed the school affairs through a district clerk appointed by the township superintendent at their recommendation. The district extended from Hawthorne avenue to the Union County line and from Weequahic Lake to the Irvington line. Miss McLeod was still living in East Orange when the school building was taken down and reconstructed in the Newark Museum garden, and she took part, with Dr. Ward, in the laying of the cornerstone there in 1938.

The Museum has furnished the building to resemble as closely as possible the way it looked when school "kept" in it. All during the week, from mid-Spring to late Fall, the old school bell rings, to mark the visits of children and their teachers from Newark and all over Essex County.

If the old stone walls could talk, what a story they could tell! Washington passed by the school at least once, and there is a tradition that the French exile Talleyrand taught here, or at least visited here, though this may be merely folklore. The stone schoolhouse was erected in 1784 to replace an earlier building of wood put up about 1728, on land bought from the Hackensack Indians for a quarter of a pound of gunpowder. This school was burned down during the Revolution, some say by the British, others say by a stroke of lightening.

THE oldest building now standing, used continually for public school purposes in Newark, is the State Street School, built in 1846. Before this, public school classes were held in rented buildings. But the story of the beginning of public education in Newark is so interesting it deserves a separate article which we shall give later.

The school with the longest continuous history in Newark is the Newark Academy, a private school which has occupied four buildings during its 275 years. The use of the Common Land for this school was voted at the Town Meeting in 1774 and the exact site chosen by the trustees for the subscribers. A tablet on a large boulder in Washington

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WHEN NEWARK

(Cont'd from Preceding Page). Park was erected by the Newark Schoolmen's Club to mark the location of the first building, used as a Revolutionary barrack after its headmaster, William Haddon, a Tory, fled to New York. In a British raid in 1780 the Academy was burned to the ground.

Though all the official records of the school's earliest days are lost, advertisements in the New York papers in 1774 and 1775 tell us the curriculum and the masters' names. These are quoted in full in a brief history of the academy written by Dr. Wilson Farrand for Newark's 250th anniversary. Girls as well as boys attended the Academy in the early days, being taught in separate classes. A boarding school, the academy drew pupils from near and far, instructing them in "the learned languages," "Mathematicks," reading, writing, arithmetic and bookkeeping, and "the English tongue gramatically." Newark had only 1,000 inhabitants at this time, and it speaks well for the enterprise of her inhabitants that they established this fine school.

FOR 12 years the Academy remained closed, while Newark recovered from the devastation of war. Then a group of public spirited men, including some of the same people responsible for the building of the Newark bridge and turnpike, revived the school, incorporating and raising the money for a new building by a lottery. The present Academy street, cut through in 1804, marks the site of this second building which was occupied from 1795 until 1855 when it was sold to the United States Government. The building was demolished in 1856 to make way for the Customs House and Post Office.

Another private school, the Newark Wesleyan Institute, which stood at the corner of High and William streets, being about to close, the Academy bought its buildings which was used until 1930 when the present school on First street, near Branch Brook Park, was completed.

In 1792 when the Newark Academy was rebuilt there was a town school house standing on the south side of Market street, on part of the Old Burying Ground. Built some time before 1714 it was a small building about 20 feet square and one story in height. This was not a public school, for there were no tax-supported schools in Newark until 1814. Parents who had children to send paid annual subscriptions and the school was run by a board of trustees. If any of the children of the poor attended this school, fees were paid for them by the overseers of the poor, or by those individuals in the community to whom they were "bound out."

School House Alley extended to Old Burying Ground in 1800s when Market Street School was a landmark near Newark's Four Corners.

The original school was replaced in 1806 by a new stone school house about twice as large, and 2½ stories high. Some Newarkers will remember this ancient building for it was not torn down until 1900, being used in the later years as the Newark Boys' Lodging House. Younger Newarkers, passing School House Alley on the south side of Market street, may have wondered at the name in a seemingly strange location. Here stood Newark's first school building.

OCCASIONALLY an old Newarker asks "Who remembers 'the White School House?'" An answer given by Frank J. Urquhart, an editor of The Newark Sunday Call, on August 14, 1922, describes the little frame building erected in 1792 in

what was then the far southern end of the town, on land now occupied by Clinton Park and the Colleoni statue. This park, like Washington Park where the Academy was built, and the Burying Ground where the Market Street School stood, was common land, set apart by the founders for public use.

The White School House, sometimes called the "South Literary Institute," was built largely by the efforts of Captain Jabez Parkhurst, part of the money coming from the proceeds of a play which he wrote and produced. It burned down on March 28, 1848. Many of the scholars in this school, whose curriculum consisted mainly of the three ($2.50) for three to five evenings of school a week. It was not long before the fees were abolished. The memorial tablet erected by the Newark Schoolmen's Club in his honor may be seen on the Kiren Building at 77 Market street.

THE schooling of the children of parents who had any means at all was deemed from the first to be the responsibility of those parents. In 1676, when the town's officers first looked into the matter of securing a teacher for Newark's children, the money to pay him was raised by subscription among those who had children of their own. There is a difference of opinion as to



Junior Museum member in costume of '50s poses at a desk used at the time of Newark Academy.

Photo courtesy Newark Museum

Rs and the catechism, were apprentices. Much of the unskilled work done in the shoe industry, the hat manufacturing or by the town printer, was performed by apprentice boys in their 'teens. The terms of indentures required that the boys be given a certain number of quarters of schooling by their masters, and most of them attended this institution or a school for apprentices established by Moses N. Combs, Newark's first industrialist.

Combs Alley was named for Moses Combs who established the first free school in Newark, and probably the first night school in the city, if not the first in the country. Moses Combs was an extremely devout man, and about 1792 he began the custom of calling together his apprentices after work for study and religious instruction. Eventually he employed teachers and equipped a school room in an upper floor of a building on the south side of Market street, near Plane. The lower floor was a meeting room for religious services. In 1794 Mr. Combs advertised his school in Woods' Newark Gazette, a year's tuition being set at 10 shillings (about who was Newark's first teacher. The tablet erected by the Newark Schoolmen's Club names him as John Catlin, who probably taught the children in his home which stood at what is now the south corner of Broad and Commerce streets.

Possibly he was the first native of Newark to act as a teacher for the town's children. However, an arbitration bond preserved in the New Jersey Historical Society, and written in Newark in June, 1677, bears the notation "This is a true copy drawn from the original by Mr. John Arnold, School Master." Probably Mr. Arnold, who acted as clerk in drawing this bond was the teacher whom the town's men brought to Newark in accordance with a resolution passed February 7, 1676. In Norwich, Conn., where Mr. Arnold later lived and taught, there are records showing that he lived for a time in Newark, several of his children being born here. David Pierson, compiler of the first Newark directory in 1836 is the authority for John Catlin being the first teacher, but there is no such reference to him in the Newark Town Record.